

# ‘Shooting Total Strangers’

## Unmasking Militarism and the Production of Pacifism in Virginia Woolf’s ‘A Society’ and ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid’

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents what Slavoj Žižek calls ‘unmasking’ as a central feature of Virginia Woolf’s pacifist agenda. Accompanying the rise of extreme nationalisms during the 1930s and 40s, the article argues that militaristic discourse ‘masks’ the bodies of unknown others as dangerous antagonists to justify their violent deaths. Patriotic commemoration, however, renders domestic soldiers free from this precarity as men whom Judith Butler calls ‘grievable’ subjects, or those who continually engage in acts of warfare on their nation’s behalf because it grants them cultural visibility despite their bodily undoing. In ‘A Society’ and ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,’ then, a stylistic use of terminological clashes and ambiguities undoes ideological antagonism by highlighting a transgressive site of shared vulnerability where a new, more peaceful language for understanding the diversity of human existence arises. Ultimately, this literary aesthetic invites reformed styles of international diplomacy by upholding otherness not as something or someone in need of erasure but as a locale where pacifist thinkers can foster productive, ethically engaged dialogue among all individuals, places, and beliefs.

### KEYWORDS

Woolf, war, pacifism, nationalism, ideology

### INTRODUCTION

The ‘alien’ is a frightening symbol of the fact of difference as such, of individuality as such, and indicates the realms in which man cannot change and cannot act and in which, therefore, he has a distinct tendency to destroy.

—Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

listen not to the bark of the guns and the bray of the gramophones but to the voices of the poets, answering each other, assuring us of a unity that rubs out divisions as if they were chalk marks only; to discuss with you the capacity of the human spirit to overflow boundaries and make unity out of multiplicity.

—Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*

In ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid’ ([1940] 2008b), an essay Virginia Woolf wrote during World War II while her home in Rodmell faced nightly bombings, the narrator professes the ineffectiveness of pacifist thinkers liberating British men from armed service unless they also free their enemies: ‘what is the use of freeing the young Englishman if the young German and the young Italian remain slaves?’ (219). In this article, I argue that a key feature of Woolf’s pacifism involves disrupting exclusionary narratives of national belonging to form a language of shared vulnerability that counters warmongering rhetoric in societies that the horrors of warfare repeatedly blight. I characterize this intent through Woolf’s use of terminological clashes and uncertainties to overcome antagonistic belief systems by revealing Britain’s ‘enemies’ as harmless ‘strangers’ whom the military deceptively vilifies in this way as a means of justifying their deaths. Throughout this article, I contend that only those who possess what Judith Butler calls ‘grievable’ status are free from precarity because, even though their exploitation at the hands of the British military severely risks their lives, patriotic commemoration grants these people an honorific subjectivity capable of outliving their physical ends. I thus establish joint risk as a driving force behind Woolf’s vision of a harmonious world order, where the ‘unmasking’ of foreign opponents as mutually precarious victims of hegemonic leadership permits the emergence of new discourses for conversing with these now-visible and no-longer-belligerent others. Ultimately, Woolf loads political and artistic impetus at the intersection where these opposing nationalisms transgressively merge. ‘A Society’ and ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid’ both potentialize a democratic future that respects all existences regardless of geopolitical positionality, thereby inviting governments to use this site of alterity to produce pacifist diplomacy rather than combativeness.

### **INTELLECTUAL ‘ADAPTION’ AND THE NATIONALISTIC ‘FRAME’**

My choice to analyze Woolf’s short story ‘A Society’ alongside her pacifist essay ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid’ derives from my view of these texts as companion pieces that outline the cause and outcome of exclusionary nationalism. While ‘A Society’ presents British politics as an aggressively expansionistic force that can only tolerate foreignness through appropriative colonialism or militaristic eradication, ‘Thoughts of Peace in an Air Raid’ establishes resistance to this process upon an individual’s willingness to recognize the validity of human lives regardless of ideological or state allegiances. While current scholarship on Woolf’s pacifism focuses primarily upon the power of individual thought to dispel such notions of patriotic belonging, my analysis uses Žižek’s theory of masking to locate change at the level of ideology itself, arguing that the world must first find pragmatic ways of holding oft-contradictory perspectives in harmony before they can effectively alter the mindsets of their citizens.<sup>1</sup> As the narrator of ‘Thoughts on

Peace in an Air Raid' remarks, it is not enough to 'think' peace into existence unless each country frees their young men from the physical burden of serving divisive, militaristic rhetoric (216). Indeed, as an essay Woolf wrote upon the outbreak of World War II, 'Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid' suggests that European countries have largely failed to transcend the nationalistic biases of 'A Society' despite the founding of organizations such as the League of Nations because, once again, it describes how Europe has resorted to perceiving human others as dangerous adversaries worthy of death. Rather than presenting this mentality as a failure of individual thought, I use 'A Society' to localize intolerance within state structures themselves, showing how countries like Britain, whose institutions disallow ideological otherness from entering public discourse, will always turn a blind eye to the destruction of its aggressive foreign policies. With the Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs reporting deaths of over 310,000 civilians in the Middle East since 2001 (Brown University, 2020), Woolf's work shows that the need to change attitudes towards the precarity of others is far from over. While the Global West widely commemorates the lives it lost during both World Wars, it has yet to abandon warfare as a form of international diplomacy. Instead, the UK and its allies have merely exacerbated the invisibility of foreign others with techniques such as drone bombing to distance and alienate their soldiers from those they kill, including civilians. Accordingly, I present the two texts under analysis in this article as important resources for examining the cultural mechanics of continuing international conflict and to highlight how thinkers can help in war's end by critically withdrawing from the corrupt ideas of nationhood that organize their communities.

In 'A Society,' Woolf presents Britain as an intellectual arrangement that the country's commanding men must repair and preserve when returning the country to a sense of stability after the disruptions of World War I. Akin to Horkheimer and Adorno's discussion of Enlightenment thought as a form of 'patriarchal' or even 'totalitarian' power ([1944] 2002, 2-4), male intellect in this story manages the identifiable scope of the nation by unifying its values and productive output under an 'ideal' that is an encompassing 'system from which everything and anything follows' (4). Woolf's short story describes a group of young women who refuse to 'bring another child into the world' (119) until they fully understand this 'system' along with the militaristic, economic, and artistic customs that govern its citizens' lives. The unnamed narrator, who is also a member of this group, recounts how each character intercepts a different locus of civil authority: some go 'to the British Museum; others to the King's Navy; some to Oxford; others to Cambridge'; they hear 'modern music in concert rooms,' go 'to the Law Courts,' and see 'new plays' (Woolf [1920] 2003, 120). All of these architectural spaces signify everyday zones of activity and places that educational institutions support when they nurture the masculine figures who will come to regulate them. As the narrator notes, central to the construction and

administration of Britain's public establishment is the male brain. The country's universities teach men to 'cultivate [their] intellect' and adopt a profession that maintains its male-centric landscape: 'He becomes a barrister, a civil servant, a general, an author, a professor. Every day he goes to an office. Every year he produces a book' (129). As a relentless deluge of masculine output, intellectual work and its inventions in 'A Society' signify not only mental ability, but also a source of human control. Predating the disorder of World War I that perforates the story before its final reversion to peacetime customs, the patriarchal culture the narrator describes constitutes the recognizable features of British life and a semblance of normalcy that its male leaders predefine for their subjects to fight for, uphold, and then return to once they have victoriously defeated their adversaries.

The story's presentation of Britain's state enginery as intellectual labor is therefore impetus for expansionistic policies such as war and colonialism because the country must overcome sources of knowledge or ways of life that frustrate its accepted worldview. The women in 'A Society' understand the scope of male ability in terms of spatiality, marveling at how 'man flies in the air, talks across space, penetrates to the heart of an atom, and embraces the universe in his speculations' (125). The narrator here affirms patriarchal activity upon its need to encompass far-reaching zones of enquiry, ensuring that no scientific discourse remains threateningly beyond academic capture. In a forceful act of brainwork, the male-construed civilization in 'A Society' is one that reaches far into the cosmos but also microscopically inwards, grouping these disparate regions of inquest under a single masculine lens. In what Horkheimer and Adorno call the totalitarian 'power of repetition' or 'adaption' in Enlightenment thought (8), this kind of reasoning is troubling because it renders external matter fully knowable, which fuels practices such as imperialism because it flattens all intricacies of the object world and enables their forced synthesis into Britain's colonial endowment. Indeed, while members of the society 'go through a vast tangle of statistics' about England like its population and class structure, they formulate their findings with an awareness of growth into 'The British Colonies [...] our rule in India, Africa and Ireland' (125). The women in 'A Society' complete their study of Englishness with recourse to its imperial outposts, understanding that the demographic innerness of the British Isles is inseparable from its territorial outer-ness. To borrow from Judith Butler, the country's internality depends on something 'outside' of it to 'make the very sense of the inside possible' (2009, 9). Woolf predicates the power of Britain's leadership in this story upon foreignness as territory that its Empire seizes and incorporates into its own nationalistic 'frame,' thereby augmenting what is 'inside' these borders as a constantly growing intellectual and geographical legacy.

Indeed, it is for this very reason that Woolf describes Oxford and Cambridge as ships conquering the globe in *A Room of One's Own* ([1929] 2008a). Using terminology evoking an imperial mission, Oxbridge is 'like a sailing-ship always voyaging never arriving, lit up at night and visible for miles, far away across the hills' (11). The fact that these universities never arrive at their destination betrays their dependency upon a constant excess of academic space to conquer and then internalize within their scholarly confines. Like Woolf's portrayal of the patriarch in this same essay who holds 'great numbers of people, half the human race indeed, inferior to himself' as one of the 'chief sources of his power' (45), British intellect fortifies its superiority over extraneousness by designating it intrinsically subordinate and annexable, thus warranting the forceful merging of otherness into the restrictive bounds of colonialist-patriarchal law. 'How is he to go on giving judgement,' the narrator asks, 'civilizing natives, making laws [...] unless he can see himself at breakfast and at dinner at least twice the size he really is?' (Woolf 2008a, 46). As Woolf's contemporary Bertrand Russell argues in *Why Men Fight* (1917), such a belief in the 'superior excellence of one's own group' is a major cause of war because it provokes 'the feeling that only the good and evil of one's own group is of real importance, and that the rest of the world is to be regarded merely as material for the triumph or salvation of the higher race' (14–15). In 'A Society,' Woolf shares Russell's view of globalized aggression being 'embodied in imperialism' (Russell 1917, 15) when she presents Britain's perspective through unifying 'frames' of knowledge capable of encompassing and overwriting foreign domains extrinsic to its own philosophy of existence. Britain's educational institutions in this story are not only for schooling its commanding men but also partaking in intellectual assault, wherein adapting other cultures into the nation's own ideological 'frame' becomes a strengthening condition of its state identity.

However, 'A Society' also implies the tenuousness of this particular mindset because Britain's ruling men can only seize upon otherness by first recognizing it as something initially exempt from their authoritative oversight. The women's recognition of Britain's rule over its colonies betrays a constant proximity with foreign others, suggesting that the country must legitimize the presence of alternative lifestyles but as people or values to overcome. In 'A Society,' then, although World War I brings the threat of overseas hostility, it also potentializes a victory for Britain that would rejuvenate its global standing by surmounting hazardous opposition. For this reason, while Poll can easily list previous conflicts because the male-penned histories she studies have already incorporated them into Britain's vocabulary of state, the current struggle remains an enigma to her: 'I don't know what they're going to war for now,' she admits (128). At this point in the story, Woolf introduces the War as a dubious moment of unknowability. Since the Triple Alliance threatens the country's geographical and political independence at this very instant,

Woolf does not recount the conflict but instead presents it as a blank space of three asterisks on the page to convey the inability of male authority and, by extension, the women living under its jurisdiction, to yet make cognitive sense of it. In its startling newness, the War is not yet in textual form like the past struggles Poll lists and so breaches the narrative as a temporal break of unknowable crisis that ruptures Britain's intellectual framework of national being.

After both the end of the War and the text's empty gap, the story's immediate revival demonstrates how Britain as victors transform the conflict into a self-serving account of history and social cohesion. The post-War part of the story begins with the narrator noting that 'The war was over and peace was in the process of being signed' (128). Here, the speaker illustrates how Britain 'signs' the Treaty of Versailles and re-establishes a tenuously feigned sense of regular nationhood, albeit one the text overshadows with even more global aggression. The masculine practice Poll noted earlier of rendering international conflicts finished or knowable transpires once again when the text defaults to its pre-War setup. The women go back to their usual activity of public sphere scrutiny, illustrating that with the armistice comes a renewal of patriarchal governance along with its exclusion of them from defining the country's onwards course. By the story's end, Britain has returned to a state of regularity that leaves the androcentric ideals coordinating its growth and development troublingly intact until the next cataclysmic event. One of Poll's closing remarks is thus a desperate and disturbingly predictive plea for the lives of those living under hostile male rulers: 'unless we provide [these men] with some innocent occupation we shall get neither good people nor good books; we shall perish beneath the fruits of their unbridled activity; and not a human being will survive to know that there once was Shakespeare' (129). While Poll regards Shakespeare's oeuvre as an art form worthy of protection, she realizes it will become obsolete if her country's administrators fail to respect mankind or abandon their relentlessly 'unbridled' political and intellectual enterprises. As a risk of political violence that menaces those both inside and outside her country's borders, Poll calls for Britain to preserve the alterity of others as a way of extending the same security upon their own citizens and culture. Since Poll establishes this concern upon the awareness of an impending global catastrophe, she implies that such invasiveness is not unique to Britain but a trait of patriarchal leadership in general. If the nature of masculine 'activity' lies in its 'unbridled' nonrestraint, then opposing it requires an equally as combative force, such as further male aggression. Due to this inescapable homosociality, Poll recognizes the necessity of reforming masculine behavior and creating a more peaceful world order in the process, affirming this change on men's willingness to desist from expansionistic ventures to protect not only the foreign others they approach but also the home civilians living under their rule.

## COMMEMORATION, ‘GRIEVABILITY’ AND THE ‘MASKING’ OF WAR

In ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,’ I thus show how Western militarism justifies the erasure of belligerents by evacuating their bodies of all fragility, arguing that pacifist thinkers can counter this procedure by reloading emotional affect into these not-so-different individuals. Woolf wrote the essay in response to the outbreak of World War II and uses it to detail how Europe has once again incited its men to kill unknown aliens by construing them as dangerous antagonists who require death under the name of patriotic service. Based upon Woolf’s own experience of German air raids, the speaker lies in bed to the sound of bombs dropping around her home while asking herself why men engage in violent warfare. She finds a potential answer to this issue in a quotation from a fictional British soldier:

To fight against a real enemy, to earn undying honour and glory by shooting total strangers, and to come home with my breast covered with medals and decorations, that was the summit of my hope...It was for all this that my life so far had been dedicated, my education, training, everything (250; ellipsis in original).

The force of the above passage hinges upon the terminological clash between fighting a ‘real enemy’ and shooting ‘total strangers.’ Woolf uses this dissonance to indicate how the British government utilizes warfare without acknowledging the human lives it brutally obliterates, thereby allowing militarism to dominate ‘everything’ about a normal male upbringing because it deceptively promotes the completeness of their national order and the need to expunge any alternative way of life that undermines it. In using both terms to label the same group of people, Woolf establishes what Žižek calls ‘an antagonistic split’ traversing the beliefs and attitudes of the British population ([1989] 2008, 142). As members of an opposing political territory, these ‘strangers’ expose an ‘insupportable, real, impossible kernel’ (Žižek [1989] 2008, 45) because their oppositional beliefs subvert the coherence of Britain’s own nationalistic worldview along with its discriminative criteria of citizenship. For this reason, British ‘education’ and ‘training’ must construe the whole population of this foreign land as a singular ‘enemy’ to prevent their contrasting ideological views from undermining the integrity of their own.<sup>2</sup> As Žižek explains, this distortion of opposing beliefs produces a ‘social fantasy,’ or the false supremacy of one’s own ideological dogma that becomes a ‘counterpart to the concept of antagonism’ and ‘precisely the way the antagonistic fissure is masked’ (142). The implication of Žižek’s theory in terms of transnational combat is that it brings clashing ideologies into a turbulent adjacency, meaning that opponents engaged in global disputes must somehow acknowledge a conflicting state doctrine while maintaining the integrity of their own beliefs in the process. In this way, ‘masking’ the

German ‘stranger’ as a disturbing invader allows Britain to integrate him into its structural discourse but as a figure of threatening difference who requires instant expulsion, thereby balancing the semantic contradiction of having two adversaries occupy a single domestic frame.

By removing ideology’s falsifying lens, however, ‘unmasking’ not only unravels the binarized nature of British and German identities by mingling each within a single narrative, but also establishes the maintenance of such division as the main task of exclusionary nationalism. The airman from neither country can exist without the other’s antithetical identity. Concepts of enemy and ally, foreigner and compatriot, self and other are mutually dependent; the British pilot requires his ‘enemy’ to give his own sense of nationhood a genuine, delimited existence. Without his foe, the ‘education’ and ‘training’ organizing the British airman’s life would become ineffectual because there would be no dangerous foreignness for these customs to confront. When the narrator remarks that, ‘Up there in the sky young Englishmen and young German men are fighting each other’ (216), then, she deliberately magnifies the discord that authorizes but also thwarts these two ideological stances: rather than British heroes encountering their foes, defenders and attackers collide with ‘each other’ in a cloudy realm of non-signification that obscures any allied or belligerent position. Indeed, even though the narrator recognizes that ‘the young Englishman’ is ‘fighting up in the sky to defeat the enemy’ (216), he faces not the bullets of German ‘strangers’ but a ‘spate of words from the loudspeakers and politicians’ that have ‘whirled [him] up into the sky and [keep] him circling there among the clouds’ (217). On account of the provocative ‘words’ that milk the violent tendencies of men, warmongering rhetoric from these politicians and the mass-media traps both Germans and Britons within a hazardous domain of masculine engagement where the only escape is by killing their fellow prisoner or falling to the earth themselves as sacrificial icons. Accordingly, although the speaker acknowledges Nazi attempts to ‘destroy freedom’ across the globe (216), she also examines how European ‘idea makers’ in general can coax young men into carrying out brutal political goals while putting their lives and those of unknown ‘strangers’ on the line for abstract notions of national belonging that override the threat of their traumatic downfall.

Since the essay’s account of mechanicalized warfare implicates ally and belligerent alike in its potentially lethal ventures, we must ask why the British airman willingly gives himself to war despite the prospect of his violent end. To ensure that men like him repeatedly carry out acts of authorized bloodshed, the military must uphold a male-privileging culture that prevents these soldiers from refusing conscription or identifying the precariousness they share with their eradicable adversaries. As the soldier in ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid’ suggests, military traditions replace these dead enemy bodies with the ‘medals and decorations’ he receives for



successfully killing these same people, thereby supplanting the visceral aftereffects of the frontline with patriotic objects that give Britain's restrictive national identity a culturally visible presence. British soldiers can 'come home' after fighting only because these medals eclipse the German enemy's corpse and render him what Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak call a non-subject whom Britain 'unbinds, releases, expels, banishes' to delimit and solidify the exclusionary signs of its ideological terrain (2007, 5). To maintain the distinction of British citizenship, the government enacts this erasure because recognizing the death of an enemy along with their own men would permit a figure whom the nation eliminates to disturbingly undo its prejudicial norms of statehood. In Butler's account of commemoration, mourning observances designate racialized others imperceptible to deflect import onto their 'grievable' counterparts and authenticate these citizens as nationalistic '[icons] for self-recognition' (2004, 34). Following Butler, I assert the co-dependency of 'grievable' and 'ungrievable' selves during times of conflict because both deaths support the same act of nation-building in a dialectical way. Namely, the body of an 'ungrievable' German opponent must remain invisible so as to make visible his 'grievable' British correlative, meaning that the decorations Britain uses as emblems of militaristic victory are contingent upon the perpetual absence of foreign belligerents whom the country deliberately precludes from its commemorative rituals. Ultimately, military commanders must guarantee that battle never negates the homegrown soldier's privileged status to establish his prestige as an ongoing reward for military sacrifice, which incites other 'grievable' men to similarly accept life-threatening demands of war and the fight for a future they may not personally experience.

Woolf thus reveals that the airman of 'Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid' engages in battle because the military awards him an honorific standing even though he may die while shooting total strangers on his country's behalf. Due to the British airman's patriotic entitlement, the narrator questions whether disarmament would provide an adequate remedy for male warmongering, remarking of this situation that 'Othello's occupation will be gone; but he will remain Othello' (218).<sup>3</sup> In this reference to Othello's descent from a model commander in the Venetian army to the jealousy-racked and murderous lover of Desdemona, the speaker implies that, while demobilizing individual men would obstruct an official channel for their violence, the aggressive 'instincts' that 'education and tradition' foster will persistently influence their behavior (218). In other words, though demobilized soldiers may no longer be fighters in a vocational sense, a cultural 'idea maker' keeps these subjects upon the patriarchal stage where they uphold their violently 'unbridled' engagements. For our young pilot, then, as long as patriarchal customs write the system within which men like him perform, there 'will remain' an ideological formula that shapes Western notions of manhood despite the absence of their bodies. In the 'medals and decorations' of war, along with the 'education and tradition' that disseminate

these items, the narrator recognizes an always-available equipment of combative performativity that predates and forms the young conscript's 'instincts' as a masculine player within an androcentric, war-driven world. Although Butler argues that this arrangement 'presumes the grammatical 'subject' prior to the account of his genesis' (1997, 111)—the vocabularies of gender that pre-exist male socialization and determine acceptable standards of masculinity within Western society—I note the reversal of Butler's logic to account for the same gender norms that outlive the airman and will continue to prompt the interpellation of other men after his death. Commemoration grants these men as grievable subjects a presumptive self even if war makes possible the violent negation of their bodies: a status their ungrievable antagonists do not, indeed must not, share because it would subvert the exclusionary rights of being a male British citizen.

Woolf thus addresses in 'Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid' how European politics in the 1930s reached a situation where governments saw other human beings not as equals deserving of life but embodiments of a conflicting worldview whom they could only apprehend intellectually as targets of their explosives. While this statement resonates with the horrors of Nazi antisemitism—an issue Woolf certainly would have addressed had she lived to experience its outcome—I also associate it with warfare more generally and how nationalistic sentiment brings soldiers to aim their weapons not only at geopolitical places but the people who seemingly carry the values of these same territories.<sup>4</sup> Since this process disguises the true nature of warfare by obscuring dead enemy bodies with patriotic artefacts that materialize a nation's identity, Woolf proposes ending this procedure so that Europe as a whole can gain a more harmonious post-War heritage. After rejecting disarmament as a viable option for reform, the narrator proclaims that women must 'help the young Englishmen to root out from themselves the love of medals and decorations' and create 'more honourable activities for those who try to conquer their fighting instinct' (218). The narrator here rejects commemorative 'masking' to imagine a new kind of cultural loss that men then replace with accomplishments not dependent upon bodily erasure. As its primary objective, the essay authorizes pacifist-feminist thinkers to produce a creative resource that will 'compensate man for the loss of his gun' (218) and so withdraw the need for weaponry as a political wager when partaking in global diplomacy. That is not to say that Woolf is downplaying the unique horrors of German atrocities: she died before knowledge of Nazi concentration camps came to light and had first hand experience of the Luftwaffe's air raids on European civilians. Nevertheless, by referring to Adolf Hitler as, 'Aggressiveness, tyranny, [and] the insane love of power made manifest' (217), the narrator upholds that people might undermine state-condoned violence by recognizing the precarity of those who stand at the other end of their gun, which, I argue, encourages those whom ideological 'tyranny' often manipulates to form empathy towards foreign 'strangers' as the groundwork of an improved transnational community.

At a pivotal moment near the essay's closure, the narrator signals this conversation by moving her German 'stranger' out of the clouds of narrative ambiguity and transforming him into an acquaintance upon British soil. Though guns have 'brought down' his plane somewhere 'behind the hill' of the text's English landscape, the narrator remodels this act of anti-aircraft fire into one of welcoming accommodation (219). She reminisces that the German 'landed safe in a field near here the other day. He said to his captors, speaking fairly good English, 'How glad I am that the fighting is over!' Then an Englishman gave him a cigarette, and an Englishwoman made him a cup of tea' (219). The speaker here undoes the antithetical logic of us-versus-them that has until this event permeated her narrative by giving a voice, personality, and agency to someone who usually exists as an expendable non-person who dies 'behind the hill' of public awareness entirely. At the essay's finale, then, the harrowing experience of falling from the sky and landing upon enemy soil is not one of endings but growth and futurity: 'if you can free the man from the machine,' the narrator remarks, 'the seed does not fall upon altogether stony ground. The seed may be fertile' (219). While Woolf does not disclose what kind of discourse this liberation might sprout, she encourages her readers to thwart nationalistic ideology by imagining a more peaceful future once they strip their German adversaries of all 'masking' descriptors. The essay asks its public to envisage those who originate from foreign lands as lives nonetheless and no longer rivals their country need destroy, showing self/other, Briton/German not as oppositional foes but two fragile bodies whom the ideologies of militarism trap within the socially constructed 'machinery' of destructive male performance.

## CONCLUSION

By lifting the 'mask' of German antagonism in 'Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,' Woolf flags the need for pacifist work at the tumultuous site where divisive nationalistic ideologies dissolve, where 'grievable' and 'ungrievable' bodies achieve discordant unity, and where people must find mutual, non-combative ways of recognizing otherness to secure a more peaceful future for all. Serving as a juncture between her pacifism, feminism, and modernism, the essay invites politically motivated thought by undoing prohibitive ideologies of nationhood and presenting the people they no longer circumscribe in a way more conducive to global accord. Woolf thus asserts that artists should authorize peace by displaying mutual, non-weaponized approaches to otherness as members of a collectivity who all deserve freedom from violence and manipulation at the hands of extremist regimes. As a rejoinder against the 'unbridled activity' of exploitative globalization in 'A Society,' the form of pacifism I am describing here disengages from racialized exceptionalism and moves towards a reciprocal awareness of geopolitical diversity along with the varying sociocultural perspectives such heterogeneity conduces. Instead of re-imposing

homogenizing patriotic loyalties, Woolf undercuts the need to demonize those existing beyond hegemonic frames of cultural belonging and upholds this variance as a core of authenticity for world inhabitants to safeguard. By fostering such dissonance, ‘A Society’ and ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid’ encourages peace via the understanding of a mutually fragile human condition, using thoughtful, ethically engaged diplomacy rather than weaponry to view unfamiliarity not as a site of distrust but a place of intellectual growth, effort, and productivity.

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<sup>1</sup> While my analysis of Woolf’s essay upholds the importance of individual action in denouncing war, I suggest that pacifist reaction is dependent upon more systematic change in the way countries approach ‘grievability.’ Patrick Deer argues that ‘Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid’ does not present ‘a programmatic solution’ for war but instead uses ‘fluid shifts of perspective’ including ‘a mixture of realistic reportage and surrealist imagery to carve out a space for reflection’ (2009, 95). Likewise, Judith Allen centers the individual by contending that the essay uses ‘varied voices, multiple conversations and conflicting viewpoints’ in a manner that forces readers to ‘search for their own voices’ (2010, 88). Rebecca Walkowitz similarly analyzes the essay’s use of contradiction to establish a ‘complicity between Germany and Britain,’ which, she argues, ‘[shows] and [resists] the kinds of ‘thinking’ that is encouraged by ‘fighting’ (2006, 95).

<sup>2</sup> Žižek’s use of Lacanian terminology furnishes his theory with a psychoanalytical foundation. As Lacan’s Real signifies the fullness of language before symbolization carves it into a knowable account of reality, it also represents a place where opposing

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ideological discourses exist in an impossible state of unity. Žižek explains that ‘opposite or even contradictory determinations is what defines the Lacanian Real,’ allowing two antonyms to ‘build a harmonious totality’ and give to ‘the other what the other lacks—each fills out the lack in the other’ ([1989] 2008, 193). In contrast, the Symbolic world of socio-political reality is ‘differential’ and where the ‘positive presence’ of one ideological concept is ‘nothing but an objectification of a lack in its opposite element’ (194). In other words, if the Real represents a place where two ideologies can exist in an impossible state of simultaneousness, the symbolic order must somehow accommodate both discourses to give to each their linguistic meaning.

<sup>3</sup> A reference to Othello’s loss of pride and sense of self after Iago tricks him into believing Desdemona’s infidelity: ‘Farewell! Othello’s occupation’s gone’ (3.3.357).

<sup>4</sup> Woolf acknowledges the tyranny of Nazi rule in *Three Guineas* ([1938] 2008) where she decries those ‘shut out’ of the public arena ‘because [they] are Jews, because [they] are democrats, because of race, because of religion’ (304). As a commentary upon Hitler’s dictatorship, any kind of nationalism that functions through exclusion facilitates violence against the banished others who attempt to cross this boundary, or even just live authentically within its purview, and tarnish the state’s enclosure of political legitimacy.